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## Historically Speaking...

## Progress: waterways to railroads to streetcars

INDIANA COLLECTION

*Hobart -- History*

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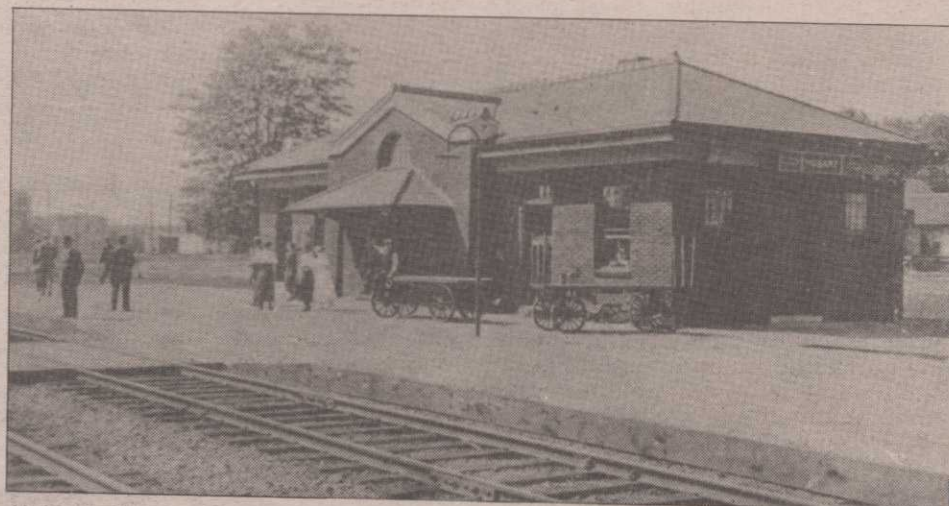
From its earliest history, transportation has been vital to Hobart's progress. In 1836, when George Earle became interested in this area, waterways offered the best routes. Earle selected Liverpool for his first settlement because it was at the head of navigation of the Calumet River where Deep River joined it. Another early settler, Henry Smith established a canal boat business at Liverpool. Although boats carried lumber and grain from the area down the Calumet to the growing Chicago market, lack of depth and shifting sandbars limited the amount of traffic the river could carry. Samuel Sigler, one of Hobart's first farmers, tried rafting grain

down the Calumet but sandbars made it a terrible trip.

After Earle's failure to establish Liverpool as the seat of Lake County (Solon Robinson won that war for Crown Point, then known as Lake Court House), the building Earle had constructed in Liverpool for a courthouse was reportedly rafted down the Calumet to Blue Island where it housed a tavern for many years.

### Railroads

Earle now turned his attention to Hobart where he built a grist mill and a saw mill. When the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne and Chicago railroad began to lay a right of way across the area, Earle helped finance and



*Hobart's Pennsy Depot, constructed in 1911, symbolizes the arrival of the railroad in Hobart, an event that transformed Hobart from an isolated settlement to a thriving community. The depot is being restored by the Save Our Station Committee and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (Save Our Station Committee).*

construct the road through Hobart. This secured modern, efficient access to the world for his new community and assured Hobart's future. It also made Hobart the railroad center of Lake County. Agricultural produce and lumber for Chicago had to be brought from other areas of the county to Hobart or on to Lake Station where the Michigan Central provided rail access to Chicago. Direct access to the railroad boosted Hobart's brickyards and lumber industries and the retail businesses serving farmers and other shippers.

The opening of the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne and Chicago railroad in 1958 marked Hobart's passage from a pioneer era to an established town.

In 1869, the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne and

Chicago became part of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The Civil War halted railroad construction in the area. It was not until 1882 that the New York, Chicago and St. Louis Railway, better known as the Nickel Plate because of the cost of its trackage, came through Hobart. The Elgin, Joliet & Eastern (EJ & E) was built in 1888 and included a spur to the Kulage brickyard. Although only the Nickel Plate, now the Norfolk and Southern, now runs through Hobart, Hobart is still known to rail fans for its position in area rail transportation.

### Streetcars

Interurban transportation has its place in area history, too. In the stage coach era,

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Third Street looking West, Hobart, Ind. 2-hi



*A streetcar of the Gary, Hobart & Eastern Traction Company makes its way east on Third Street toward the Pennsy Depot. The Depot extension operated for only about four years from 1915 to 1919. (Hobart Historical Society).*



# PROGRESS REPORT

## Streetcars

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Hobart was a stop on the Joliet-Chicago-Detroit line and on the shorter Michigan City to Crown Point line.

It was just one hundred years ago, in 1895, that the first attempt was made to bring streetcar transportation to Hobart. In the end it took 19 years to establish regular service. Local businessmen formed the Hobart & Western Electric Railway Company in 1895 and obtained a franchise for a Hammond - Hobart - Valparaiso line but the project fell through. Other companies were formed and granted franchises in 1903, 1907 and 1908. None of these plans came to fruition.

Finally, in 1911 the Gary, Hobart & Eastern Traction Company managed to lay track from town out Third Street, over to Washington and along the Pennsylvania Railroad to 37th Avenue in Gary. The line opened on September 21, 1912 but ran for only a few weeks. The gas-electric car proved unreliable and capital was not available to make the needed improvements.

It was not until 1914, after rebuilding the

line that the company was able to offer regular service. In 1915, the line was extended east on Third Street to the Pennsy Depot. The Depot extension was abandoned, however, about 1919, when the cost of rebuilding the track in connection with city improvements on Third Street, exceeded any possible income. The streetcar line continued to struggle financially and changed hands several times until 1925 when it merged with Gary Railways. Gary Railways converted to buses on the Hobart route and Hobart's last streetcar ran on March 19, 1939.

Although the Gary, Hobart Traction Company maintained two box cars to haul ice from Hobart's Lake George to Gary, the primary impact of the streetcars for Hobart was in residential growth. Dependable public transportation to the mill gates in Gary allowed workers to move to suburban areas along the streetcar line. After the first World War, home building boomed in Hobart; it was on its way to becoming a bedroom community.

Both the streetcars and the buses, which replaced them, are long gone from Hobart streets but their traces are not entirely erased. The line to downtown Hobart ran down what is now the Third Street parkway and the turn toward Gary is visible in the diagonal alley at the west end of the parkway. Vestiges of the old streetcar tracks pop up through the paving on Second Street at Washington.

The streetcar barn is still here, too. It now houses Boyd Construction's office on the south-

west side of the Third Street bridge. The barn was built in 1912 on land donated by the Earles. It is constructed of tile from the Ottawa, Ill. plant of National Fireproofing. The barn was built to hold several cars, an office, waiting room, and facilities for the conductors. The barns were directly across the street from the ice house where the blocks could be loaded for transport to Gary, and the wide lot in front of the building was once the yard where the streetcars pulled in for maintenance or to wait for the next run.



George Lute's team of horses paraded for Hobart's Centennial Celebration in 1947. (Photo courtesy of Linda Shedrow.)